DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 796 JC 880 334

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TITLE Freshman Strategy Seminar. A Pilot Study.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Symposium on Developmental/Remedial Education of the New York College Learning Skills Association (11th, Catskills, NY, April 17-19, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; College Freshmen; Community Colleges; Grades (Scholastic); *High Risk Students; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Remedial Instruction; *Remedial Mathematics; *Remedial Reading; School Holding Power; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students; Withdrawal (Education); *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Cluster Courses; Erie Community College NY

ABSTRACT

In fall 1987, a Freshman Strategy Seminar (FSS) was pilot tested and evaluated at Erie Community College's (ECC's) South Campus to assist students lacking basic English and mathematics skills. Developmental class sections in writing, reading and math were reserved for the FSS students, in the hope that a cluster course approach would reduce attrition among this high-risk group. The FSS students also took one elective selected from a list of courses appropriate for their basic skills levels, and met regularly with instructors to determine progress and needs for student services. This report on the FSS pilot test covers orientation and advisement procedures, faculty involvement, and the methods and outcomes for each aspect of the program. For the Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Pilot Programs, separate sections provide information on student selection, the use of tutors and a skill laboratory in instruction, reading scores on pre- and post-tests, final grades, success and retention rates, student use of support services, and needs for additional remediation. Problems are identified, and recommendations offered. (EJV)

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FRESHMAN STRATEGY SEMINAR
A pilot study

by

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FRESHMAN STRATEGY SEMINAR PILOT STUDY

Introduction

A pilot Freshman Strategy Seminar Study was initiated at Erie Community College/ South Campus for the Fall 1987 semester. Students requiring the first level of developmental courses (writing, reading, and math) were encouraged to participate. The attrition rate of these students is high so the course cluster idea was implemented. A maximum of 25 students was selected using established criteria. The developmental class sections were reserved and students selected one elective from an identified course list of electives appropriate for the reading, writing, and/or math level.

Students who were in the Freshman Strategy Seminar Pilot Study were considered full time since they had ten hours of developmental courses plus one additional three-hour course for a total of thirteen hours. Students in developmental courses earn College credit. The elective course which they chose was a degree credit bearing course.

Orientation and Advisement

Students were identified at various Registration sessions and counselled by the members of the Freshman Strategy Seminar Pilot Study Task Force in separate orientation sessions. If students were pretested prior to registration, letters were sent notifying them of their eligibility for the Freshman Strategy Seminar Pilot Study. Students were given individualized attention with their schedules and were advised in their selection of an elective. Since students' interests varied each elective of interest to the student was discussed so that the student would be comfortable with the course he or she chose. The Task Force Member filled out a time schedule for the student and blocked in the appropriate courses and times. The students' registration forms were taken to the Registrar by the Task Force Member who authorized the lifting of the holds placed on the Seminar courses. In this way, the student was not subjected to any possible embarrassment when trying to register for reserved developmental courses.

Faculty Involvement

A Developmental Task Force Committee was organized to address the following items:

1. student selection - determine those students who are qualified for admission to the pilot program and send letters inviting qualified students to enroll in the appropriate courses.
2. student advisement - provide orientation session and assist students in course selection.
3. student liaison - regularly schedule meetings with students to determine concerns, needs, and progress.
4. course scheduling - work with departments in determining what courses are appropriate for students in the pilot program.

Because these students are the highest failure risk, a support network was established. Instructors met regularly (see attached evaluation form) to determine progress to date and meet each student's special needs by integrating with Student Services as needed.

NAME_____ SS#_____

ADDRESS_____ STUDENT I.D. #_____

_____ TELEPHONE #_____

ADVISOR_____ M & E CODES_____

PRETEST SCORES_____ COURSE/SECTION_____

WEEKS	PROGRESS TO DATE (LETTER GRADE)	NUMBER OF ABSENCES TO DATE	COMMENTS
1-3			
4-7			
8-11			
12-15			

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

(over)

Faculty Involvement cont'd

Integration and monitoring of support lab activities with the developmental course work and the elective course offered by various departments were stressed.

Faculty who are involved in teaching the elective to students in the pilot were requested to participate and were given evaluation forms for tracking of the students.

Support lab activities for developmental course work were integrated and monitored. Subject matter from the elective course was part of the focus for developmental reading, writing, and associated labs.

Selection of Students: Reading

All incoming day and evening matriculated students are tested using the Nelson-Denny, Form C. Analysis of achievement on both the pretest and retest indicated that approximately 8% to 15% of all students tested required the first level developmental reading course.

Originally, it was hoped that the selection of the 25 students would be completed by mid-August. However, this was not possible because these students generally do not initiate the admission procedure early. Subsequently, students who enrolled in the reserved courses were one of three groups:

1. students in the pilot
2. students who needed the first level of the three developmental courses but selected not to participate in the pilot* and
3. students who needed only two first level developmental courses.

*These students were enrolled in the first level of the three developmental courses but not in all the sections of the pilot.

For purposes of research, the three groups provided a comparison of the experimental group with two control groups. Assessment of the effectiveness of the Freshman Strategy Seminar Study will be made in terms of the success students experience in making the transition from the pilot program to the mainstream curriculum to successful completion of mainstream courses and ultimately success in completing the mainstream program and graduating from the institution.

Problem: Administration was concerned with the low enrollment so it was decided to allow students not in the pilot to register for the reserved sections. Students who registered late and qualified for the pilot could not enroll because the courses were filled. These students did enroll in developmental courses but not classes identified for the pilot.

Recommendation: This decision should be discussed after registration and prior to drop/add. Administration should make a one semester commitment to the pilot.

Methodology: Reading Pilot Program

Results from the pretest and retest indicated that students' comprehension, vocabulary, study skills, and test taking skills were below college level. The reading course was designed to meet these needs on a group and individual level. In order to accomplish this, it was essential to incorporate the Skills Lab and Student Services. Each student was assigned a peer tutor and a schedule was agreed upon. Students met as often as they required help but a minimum of 30 minutes per week was required. Additional practice assignments prepared by the instructor were available only at the Skills Lab. All completed assignments were forwarded to the

Methodology: Reading Pilot Program cont'd

instructor who corrects, identified problems, assigns (if needed) additional work, and conferences the student. The instructor also met with the peer tutor or tutor to assess student progress. In addition, the instructor monitored any reading problems that the student encountered in the elective course. Other assignments had to be handed in at the Skills Lab. Seminars such as Study Skills and Test Taking; Anxiety and Stress When Taking Tests were presented by Student Service personnel class sessions. All three groups of students had the same requirements; however, only students in the pilot program were conferenced on an established time schedule and were tracked in the elective course.

Problem: Many students experienced problems passing the elective course. They could not withdraw from the course because of financial aid requirements. Some students had problems scheduling sufficient time in the Skills Lab.

Recommendation: Revise the list of electives.
Implement a Lab for college credit.

Evaluation: Reading

The control group comprises students who needed only two developmental courses and those who qualified but selected not to participate in the pilot program. The tracking of students who qualified and wanted to participate but could not will be addressed in future studies.

Evaluation of the pilot was based on a number of factors.

1. Difference in pre and post scores on standardized tests:

PILOT GROUP	CONTROL GROUP
Pretest	Pretest
vocabulary 10.1 - 7.9	vocabulary 10.2 - 7.5
comprehension 6.0 - 8.0	comprehension 6.0 - 8.7
retention 26 - 50%	retention 44 - 75%
total 8.0 - 8.7	total 8.0 - 9.8

Reading rate was a problem for both groups.

Post test	Post test
vocabulary 12.2 - 8.2	vocabulary 11.7 - 7.5
comprehension 8.3 - 11.7	comprehension 7.7 - 9.8
retention 43 - 72%	retention 49 - 75%
total 8.2 - 11.7	total 8.0 - 10.4

2. Final course grade:

	PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
	EN010-F'87	EN011-S'88	EN010-F'87	EN011-S'88
A	8%	0%	9%	0%
B	8%	12.5%	28%	12.5%
C	59%	50%	36%	25%
D	0%	0%	0%	25%

/B

Evaluation: Reading cont'd

2. Final course grade cont'd

PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
EN010-F'87	EN011-S'88	EN010-F'87	EN011-S'88
F 16%	25%	27%	12.5%
W 9%*	12.5%	0%	0%
75% passed	72.5% passed	73% passed	37.5% passed

*Students who withdrew from course and college are at present enrolled in Freshman Strategy Seminar in Spring 1988.

Before withdrawing from the program, each student was conferenced. The majority of students withdrew for family and financial reasons.

3. Percentage of students succeeding in reading course.

PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
repeat course	25%	repeat course	27%
need Rdg. II	58%	need Rdg. II	31%
no more Rdg.	17%	no more Rdg.	42%

Since the course requirements were the same for all three groups (course work closely integrated with the Skills Lab), 59% of students did not need any more further developmental reading.

This percentage stresses the importance of the Lab course for students with reading problems.

4. Percentages/hours of tutoring Skills Lab

percentage of students who used the Lab 100%
percentage of students who regularly used the Lab 71%

average length of tutoring session - 30 minutes to 1 hour

one full-time Technical Assistant and 5 peer tutors
total number of peer tutors hours for semester - 107.5

5. Number of students requiring additional developmental courses:

PILOT GROUP

Of the 58% requiring the upper level developmental reading course,
54% are enrolled
49% are passing (midterm)
5% are failing (midterm)
4% were enrolled but withdrew before midterm
19% are enrolled and passing the Lab course

/B

Evaluation: Reading cont'd

5. cont'd

CONTROL GROUP

Of the 31% requiring the upper level developmental reading course,
28% withdrew from the college
3% are enrolled and are passing

6. Retention rate of PILOT GROUP on a semester basis:

Fall '87

Completed semester 91%
Withdrew 9%*

*The 9% were readmitted to the College for the Spring 1988 semester and are at present enrolled.

Spring '88 (Figures not available)

7. Quality point average:

PILOT GROUP	CONTROL GROUP
Fall '87	Fall '87
Overall QPA 2.23	Overall QPA 1.79
QPA for English courses 2.08*	QPA for English courses 2.24*
Withdrawal 15%	Withdrawal 20%

*This is from both developmental English courses.

Spring '88 (midterm)	Spring '88 (midterm)
Overall QPA .89	Overall QPA 1.20
QPA for English courses 1.20	QPA for English courses 2.25
Withdrawal 27%	Withdrawal 33%

Students in the PILOT GROUP during the Fall '87 semester academically achieved better than when they were not monitored and conferenced during the Spring '88 semester.

Recommendation: Students originally needing the first level of developmental courses should be assigned an advisor who will monitor their progress, frequently conference them, and establish a network of support services.

It is important to notice the withdrawal rate for the Spring '88 semester:

PILOT GROUP 27%
CONTROL GROUP 33%

Selection of Students: Writing

All incoming day and evening matriculated students must complete a writing sample based on topics selected by an English Department committee. The writing samples are graded holistically by two independent readers who are faculty members. Students are retested with a second writing sample with different topics before the

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Selection of Students: Writing cont'd

final decision for placement is completed. Approximately 50% of the students tested required either one or two semesters of developmental writing. Approximately 25% required both semesters.

Because the student selection was not completed by mid-August due to late admission for many incoming Freshmen, the students who actually were in the pilot because they qualified in all criteria were interspersed with students who needed the first level of the three developmental courses (but selected not to participate in the pilot) and students who needed only two developmental courses.

In addition to the inclusion of non-pilot students into the Freshman Strategy Seminar, some students who qualified for the Seminar were locked out due to the Administration's worry about low enrollment and the lifting of holds on the reserved sections. These students did enroll in developmental courses but they were not able to realize the benefit of the Seminar.

A recommended solution to the enrollment problem would be to encourage the Administration make a one semester commitment to the pilot.

Methodology: Writing Pilot Program

Results from the writing samples indicated that student's organization, sentence structure, punctuation and word usage was below college level. The writing course was designed to meet these needs on a group and individual level. In order to accomplish this, the Skills Center and Student Services became an integral part of the Seminar. Students were given referral notices which indicated areas needing special attention. Each student used the Skills Center by meeting with various peer tutors. Usually students felt comfortable with specific peer tutors or with the technical assistant and reported to the Skills Center as needed.

Students were encouraged to seek extra help in the Skills Center at least once a week. The average time spent by a student in the Skills Center with a tutor or a peer tutor was 30 minutes per week. Practice assignments prepared by the instructor were available at the Skills Center and were to be completed in the Center and forwarded to the instructor via a mail slot in the Skills Center. The instructor corrected all Skills Center assignments and identified writing problems. If additional work was needed, referrals were given to the student so that more time would be spent with the tutors in the Skills Center. The instructor offered suggested materials for use by the tutors and peer tutors to enhance the students' writing skills. In addition, the instructor monitored any writing assignments that the student received in his/her elective course. Suggestions for finding support material, organization and writing techniques such as brainstorming were offered to the Seminar student.

Seminars concerning library usage were presented by the Library Resource Center personnel. Additional seminars in Placement Office Registration and Form Completion were presented by Student Service personnel class sessions.

All students in developmental courses had the same requirements. Only the Seminar students were conferenced on an established time schedule and were tracked in their elective course.

Methodology: Writing Pilot Program cont'd

Problems: Sufficient time was not devoted to the elective courses due to personal problems and job time constraints. Students therefore had difficulty passing their elective course and finding time to spend in the Skills Center for extra help. Since the elective could not be dropped or the student would lose his/her full-time status, failure was frequently experienced in the elective course.

Recommendation: Try to find students with less outside obligations.
Implement a computer enhanced Lab for college credit.

Evaluation: Writing

The control group included students who needed only two developmental courses and those who qualified but selected not to participate in the pilot program. The tracking of students who qualified and wanted to participate but could not will be addressed in future studies.

Evaluation of the pilot was based on a number of factors.

1.

	PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
	EN020-F'87	EN021-S'88	EN020-F'87	EN021-S'88
A	5%	0%	5%	0%
B	20%	12.5%	15%	12.5%
C	35%	50%	25%	12.5%
D	15%	12.5%	25%	50%
F	10%	12.5%	15%	12.5%
*W	15%	12.5%	10%	12.5%
X			5%	
	60% passed	62.5% passed	45% passed	25% passed with C

*Students who withdrew for course and college are at present enrolled in Freshman Strategy Seminar. Before withdrawing from the program, each student was conferenced. The majority of students withdrew for family and financial reasons.

2. Percentage of students succeeding in course.

PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
Repeat course	25%	Repeat course	30%
Need Writing II	35%	Need Writing II	50%
Need no more writing	10%	Need no more writing	5%

Since the course requirements were the same for all three groups and the course work was closely integrated with the Skills Center, 10% of students did not need any further developmental writing. This percentage stresses the importance of the Lab course for students with writing problems.

3. Percentages/hours of tutoring in Skills Center

percentage of students who used the Center	94%
percentage of students who regularly used the Center	73%

average length of tutoring session: 20 to 50 minutes

3. Percentages/hours of tutoring cont'd

Skills Center personnel: one full-time Technical Assistant and five peer tutors.

Total number of peer tutor hours for semester: 83.5

4. Number of students requiring additional developmental courses:

PILOT GROUP

Of the 35% requiring an additional semester of developmental writing, all are enrolled and passing the writing course and are enrolled in the Lab course.

CONTROL GROUP

Of the 50% requiring an additional semester of developmental writing, 10% withdrew from the college and only 25% are enrolled.

5. Retention rate on a semester basis, Fall '87:

PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
Completed semester	45%	Completed semester	35%
Withdrew	10%	Withdrew	15%

Findings

Student Services must also become involved and provide special seminars for these developmental students.

Integration of computers into the Lab is essential to enhance student's writing skills.

Selection of Students: Mathematics

All incoming day and evening matriculated students are given a mathematics pretest. The pretest is a college generated exam consisting of fifty questions ranging from basic arithmetic to precalculus skills. Approximately 25% of the students tested require the first level developmental mathematics course (Basic Arithmetic). All students in the developmental program are retested during the first week of class to assure proper placement in the program.

One section (25 students) of Basic Arithmetic was reserved specifically for the students in the pilot (students needing all first level reading, writing and mathematics courses as determined from the pretest).

The control group consisted of all students qualifying for the pilot, but not part of it. Factors preventing students from registering for the pilot include the following:

1. Time conflicts in personal life prevented students from selecting the reserved sections.
2. Since math is not mandatory in the first semester, students opted not to take a math course.
3. Math may not have been a requirement for the student's curriculum.
4. Late registrants could not register for the pilot as the administration lifted the reserves before the end of registration and the section was closed.
5. Retesting the first week of class enabled some students to test out of the pilot and control group.

Methodology: Mathematics Pilot Program

The course content and contact hours remained the same for all sections of Basic Arithmetic including the pilot.

Students testing at this math level need arithmetic, problem solving and pre-algebra skills which the course would provide to begin to bring the students up to a college level. The students met with the instructor in a self-contained classroom lecture setting five hours per week.

The Learning Skills Center was open to the students on a drop-in basis. Appointments could also be made. The students were encouraged to attend the center, but it was not mandatory.

The instructors of the pilot met periodically to assess specific students' progress and the program in general.

Recommendation: The instructors of the pilot meet regularly with scheduled meeting dates determined at the beginning of the semester.

The following are observations made and procedures used by the instructor to enhance student learning, reduce math anxiety and maximize retention of students in the pilot math program.

Instructor-Student Relationship (Classroom)

-Taking a personal interest in each student was most important.
-Having patience and giving daily encouragement to lessen math anxiety was necessary.

Instructor-Student Relationship cont'd

-The students were asked to speak openly about their past math experiences.
-The students were given reasons as to why they should be in the course.
-A relationship with the students continued outside the classroom setting (i.e. hall, cafeteria).
-Student attendance was mandatory. If the student was not there, the student was asked WHY?
-The students clustered in pairs or groups and relationships were developed with each other. The instructor did not force this.
-If the students did not feel uncomfortable, the instructor would sit next to a group to help individually.

Course Structure (Classroom)

-Simplified vocabulary and terminology was used whenever appropriate.
-Formal rules and steps were listed when applicable for core problems, otherwise informal vocabulary was used.
-The students were taught to understand WHY--not just how. Reasons were given for proceeding to the next step.
-In problem solving, the students names were often used, and current situations regarding bank loans, discounts, wages, etc. were created.
-Small units of material were presented at one time.
-Student notebooks were required to force organization, but students were cautioned not to record the common errors that students make in their notebooks as the student may remember the error and not the correct procedure.
-Homework was required in formulating good study patterns, but the instructor was flexible and did not pass out assignments for the entire semester.
-The daily routine varied.

Evaluation (Classroom)

-Worksheets were used to help in preparation for quizzes and exams.
-Many quizzes were given for continual evaluation.
-Immediate results from quizzes and exams were given--next day at the latest.
-All exams were cumulative, constantly reinforcing previous material.

Conclusion (Classroom)

-This classroom situation was not reality. The student must be able to adjust to future classes.
-One semester was not enough time to reformulate a student after twelve years of poor results and poor study habits.
-The students felt comfortable asking for advice and speaking with the instructor during the next semester.
-The success of this pilot may not be immediate or related to the actual grade in the course, but rather the beginning of a long and gradual change in the student's educational goals.

Evaluation: Math

The control group consists of students needing only two developmental courses (testing up a level on the retest), and those who qualified for the pilot and selected not to participate in the program.

Evaluation of the pilot was based on a number of factors.

1. Final Course grades:

PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
A	0%	A	8%
B	29%	B	25%
C	14%	C	25%
D	29%	D	8%
F	14%	F	17%
W	14%*	W	17%

*Withdrawal was due to medical and personal problems.

The distribution in the control group above was based on those students actually registered in a basic arithmetic course. The control group above constitutes 48% of the original control group.

2. Percentage of students succeeding in course

PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
repeat course	28%	repeat course	34%
need Level 2 developmental	72%	need Level 2 developmental	66%

3. The original control group

52% of students in the control group did not register for basic arithmetic course.

16% - did not register for any math course
16% - did not register at the college
20% - tested Level 2 developmental on retest

4. Students requiring additional developmental courses - Spring 1988

PILOT GROUP

Of the 72% eligible to register for Level 2 (College Algebra)
-80% are enrolled
-20% did not enroll, but are still at the college

Of those students enrolled Level 2 (College Algebra)
-75% are passing at midterm
-25% passed course

Of the 28% that need to repeat the arithmetic course

4. PILOT GROUP cont'd

-100% are repeating
-100% are failing at midterm
- 0% passed course

CONTROL GROUP

Of the 66% eligible to register for Level 2 (College Algebra)
-25% are enrolled
-50% did not enroll, but are still at the college
-25% have left the college

Of those students enrolled in Level 2 (College Algebra)
-50% are passing at midterm
-50% passed course

Of the 34% that need to repeat the arithmetic course
-50% are repeating
-25% have left the college
-25% are not taking a math course

Of the 50% repeating the arithmetic course
-50% are failing at midterm
-50% passed course

5. Withdrawal from Math course - Fall 1987

PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
Completed semester	86%	Completed semester	83%
Withdrew	14%	Withdrew	17%

6. Withdrawal from Math course - Spring 1988

PILOT GROUP		CONTROL GROUP	
Completed semester	100%	Completed semester	57%
		Withdrew	43%

The pilot results suggest retention of students in the Math program is high for the pilot group; however, the pilot student's success in subsequent courses is very low.

This may indicate the student should be not mainstreamed until after he/she completes the second semester of the developmental program.

Findings

A major factor for the retention of students is the faculty involvement. A tremendous amount of extra time is needed to monitor, conference, and network these students. The pilot can be successful only with extra effort from the faculty. It is recommended that any pilot course be given a separate designation and be considered as a separate course.

A Lab course is essential for this high rish group.
Class size should be limited to a maximum of 20 students.
The Skills Lab and Student Services provide essential services.
Re-enrollment rate was encouraging; external factors were a major cause for non-continuance.
Course offerings list must be revised.
The procedure for registering students into the pilot must be refined.

Future Research

Future assessment of the pilot program will include:

1. comparative success rates when mainstreamed
2. percentages of students succeeding in degree-credit courses
3. percentages of students completing program
4. follow-up after completion of degree
5. statistical relationship between reading level and success in composition course

Recommendations for the Future of the Freshman Strategy Seminar

1. The pilot should be integrated into the developmental program at South for the Fall 1988 semester incorporating recommendations from the 1987 pilot.

2. One faculty member should be the Chair of the program and coordinate all activities.

3. The program should be assessed once again in Spring 1989 and final recommendations for continuance or termination of the program should be made at that time.

Special acknowledgment, for their efforts on behalf of the Pilot Study, should go to:

M. Finster, Instructor-Math/South
R. Mercer, Tech. Ass't.-English/South
L. Jans, Tech. Ass't.-Math/South

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